CULTURAL COLLABORATIONS

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Collaboration between cultural heritage institutions is a key to the survival of libraries in the coming decades. Whether the collaboration occurs between institutions, or an institution and its public, the partnership has to have a specific mission and be broadly communicated to its audience. Inspired by a trip to New York City and a visit to the Morgan Library and Museum, this paper will analyze the connections between art and libraries, and the possibilities of library spaces acting as museums or encouraging connections to botanical gardens. The Morgan Library and Museum differs from the typical library because it was founded as the personal collection of financier Pierpont Morgan. He amassed a collection that included Christian and Muslim illuminated manuscripts, rare books, and other notable texts. After his death, it was donated to the public by his son[1]. Although arguably the manuscript collection itself can be considered an amalgam of cultural heritage, the other notable elements of the institution include the architecture of the facility, which was designed by Charles McKim with a recent addition by Renzo Piano, and a series of art galleries. A remarkable Hans Holbein exhibit was the draw this spring, where the Renaissance paintings were displayed in museum quality galleries. This establishment is more like an elite historic home with a museum than the average library, but it does demonstrate how different types of cultural institutions can coexist in one space.

Through their vocation to serve as spaces for personal development and intellectual growth, libraries have a unique ability to serve as spaces for personal development and intellectual growth as a link between the public and the cultural opportunities offered by the arts. They take on curatorial operations and strive to preserve cultural heritage. The American Library Association (ALA) publishes the "Visual and Performing Arts in Libraries: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights," which defines the visual arts and its role in libraries. Similar to their promotion of reading banned books, the ALA states that "libraries should not avoid developing exhibits or programs because of controversial content." [2]
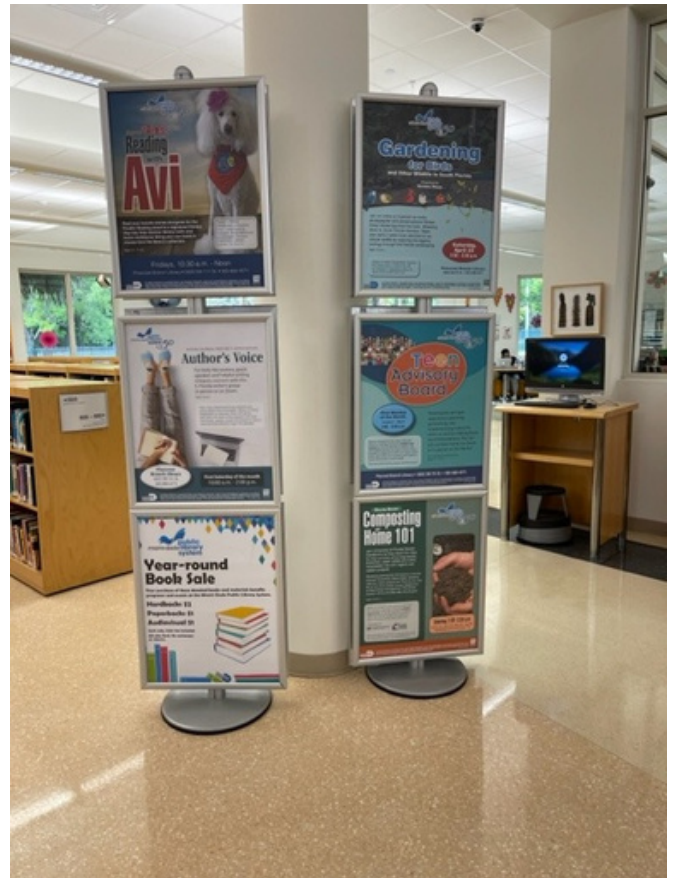

Figure 1: [Pinecrest Library.jpeg] Caption: Signage Inside the Pinecrest Library, April 2022].

They encourage the idea of having written policies in place to guarantee this intellectual liberty. These could delineate guidelines for the use of the library to display art by community groups, and other topics such as space issues or duration of an exhibit. Sussman and King found that 88% of libraries that display art, do so throughout the library, not in a confined space.[3] They also promote the idea of providing artists contracts to sign when they are part of a temporary exhibition. [4]

1 Morgan Museum and Library, "About the Morgan" (2021).

2 ALA Council, "Visual and Performing Arts in Libraries: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights," (2018).

3 Sussman, Diana Brawley, and Patrick King, "Art in the Library: A How-to Guide for Temporary Exhibitions," ILA Reporter 30 (5): 4.

4 Sussman and King, "Art in the Library: A How-to Guide for Temporary Exhibitions," 7.

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During recent visits to local South Florida libraries that display art, portions of the aforementioned findings rang true. The Miami Dade Public Library System (MDPLS) has a permanent art collection administered from its downtown main library branch. At a suburban branch location in an affluent area, Pinecrest, art was found to be displayed throughout the library. The library was bright and inviting, and displayed prints and paintings from the library system's permanent collection, not from temporary exhibits. The ALA's vision to allow controversial topics was not seen in action here, but hopefully, Miami Dade branches would be open to a range of themes. The Florida International University (FIU) Library, an academic institution outside of the scope of the public library system, has its own approach. FIU has three museums under its jurisdiction, so some art from the permanent collection could be displayed; however, the institution also works with local artists to exhibit their work. Kemp pointed out that the widespread collection of art by universities began around the time of the Civil War. [5] As seen at FIU, these collections have spread to include art that reflects the community of the institution.

The question, of course, becomes who manages the artworks in libraries. In museums, there are entire staffs of curators, directors, and registrars overseeing cultural heritage. Sussman and King found that library directors typically get involved, and Kemp found that typically librarians either worked alone or were assisted by a member of the art faculty Sussman and King, "Art in the Library: A How-to Guide for Temporary Exhibitions,"[6] Although Kemp's study is older, and perhaps overly optimistic – she stated that museums and libraries "are becoming more alike than unalike" – some observations are true. She correctly declared that librarians are qualified to assume some of the registrar duties associated with permanent collections.[7] The Miami Dade Public Library System has an entire Art Services and Exhibitions Division, which includes an art collection that can be displayed at all 50 branch locations.

For the purpose of this article, the Pinecrest Branch of the MDPLS was evaluated due to its exhibition of art; location near Pinecrest Gardens, its botanical gardens that include a performing arts space; and its adjacent Pinecrest Community Center. It seemed like an ideal setup for collaboration. Inside the library, there were banners for literacy-related events such as a book club and a children's event including a therapy poodle, but there were also projects that seemed like they held the potential for a collaboration with the botanical gardens. One workshop titled "Gardening for Birds" seemed like an opportunity to visibly promote a partnership with the gardens. Nowhere on the poster was there a mention of Pinecrest Gardens. Cross-promotion of cultural heritage institutions is imperative. Although no events specifically targeting art were listed, there were several artworks displayed from MDPLS's permanent collection. They were accompanied by small labels. One of the artists, Carlos Alfonzo, had just had an exhibition open at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Miami. This seemed like another missed opportunity to cross-promote a museum, particularly one displaying art by the same artist. So, while the branch was clean and welcoming, there was room for improvement. Pinecrest Gardens, which shares a parking lot with the library, did have signage advertising a collaboration with an artist, Bruce Monro, who has art exhibited in the gardens. In that case, there was a cross-promotion of art and outdoor space.

5 Kemp, Jane. 1994. "Art in the Library: Should Academic Libraries Manage Art?" Journal of Academic Librarianship 20 (July): 163.

6 Sussman and King, "Art in the Library: A How-to Guide for Temporary Exhibitions," 4; Kemp, "Art in the Library: Should Academic Libraries Manage Art," 164.

7 Kemp, "Art in the Library: Should Academic Libraries Manage Art," 165.

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Partnership opportunities among cultural heritage institutions and libraries abound, particularly in medium to large communities where relationships with curatorial professionals at local institutions can be forged. Libraries are cultural establishments, but their status as places of community engagement calls for wider, well-publicized, cooperation with museums, botanical gardens, and even opportunities for intangible cultural heritage. In the three very different examples discussed, the Morgan Library and Museum, FIU Libraries, and the Pinecrest Branch of the MDPLS, efforts towards cooperation exist in varying strengths. One of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) priority areas is the "Community Catalyst Initiative," which seek to "challenge museums, libraries, and their partners to transform how they collaborate with their communities". [8] This should be expanded to challenge museums and libraries to collaborate with each other. Examples include having speakers from one institution present at the other, creating programming in a series where related meetings occur in alternating locations, and visibly sharing resources. All of these potential opportunities for teamwork should be actively promoted through traditional means and in social media. While the existence of the IMLS is in itself encouraging, work remains to be done to maximize the outreach to community members in promoting activities, cultural heritage, and community-building initiatives.

8 "Community Catalyst Initiative." Community Catalyst Initiative | Institute of Museum and Library Services.

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